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Across the Bridge: Using PhotoVoice to Study Environment and Health in a Romani Community.

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Across the bridge

by Krista Harper and the Sajó River Association

Across the Bridge

Using PhotoVoice to study environment and health
in a Hungarian Roma community

by Krista Harper (University of Massachusetts Amherst)
and the Sajó River Association

2009

(Cover photo: Sándor Kelemen)



About the team

This project is the product of a participatory action research partnership between Krista Harper and the Sajó River Association for Environment and Community Development in Sajószentpéter, Hungary.

Our team came together in spring 2007 to assess the environmental and health concerns of a predominantly Roma neighborhood. Krista Harper and Judit Bari, one of the founders of the Sajó Association, assembled a group of six young neighborhood residents who contributed to the research as community-based photographers and "shoe-leather epidemiologists" using the PhotoVoice method.

The research team (left to right): Sándor Kelemen, Gábor Ruzsó, Krista Harper, Klaudia Kelemen, Judit Bari, Beatrix Stéfan, László Stefankó, and Mariann Bari



Left: Training a new lens on neighborhood life
(Photo: Krista Harper)



Right: Photos elicit concerns and stories
(Photo: Judit Bari)

The PhotoVoice Method

PhotoVoice is a research method that uses community-generated photography to elicit narratives and participant voice. Community participants use images generated in the research process to reach a wider audience for their concerns.

As team leaders, Harper and Bari posed two broad themes for the photographers: "environment" and "health." The photographers developed a third theme, "individuality," as an intervention in stereotypical images of Roma and Roma youth, more specifically.

Before any photographs were taken, the research team discussed the ethics of taking pictures and the problem of visual stereotypes of Roma. Photographers asked permission before taking photos and reviewed the image with the photographic subject before exhibiting.

Sajószentpéter

Sajószentpéter városa Miskolctól 11 km-re ÉNy-ra, Kácsi-árványi szomszédságban a Sajó folyó jobb partján, a 20-es főúttól mentén 3 km hosszan, a Bükki Nemzeti Park területén terül el. A Bükki-élelgy, Aggtelek helyi védett 27-es tölgyes erdő ágazik el. A település megközelíthető a miskolci Tassai és Gödöllői pályaudvarokból vonattal, a Búza téren pedig 30 percesként induló autóbuszokkal. A város 14.200 lakosa.

A város történelmi település. A múltban jelentős közgazdasági szerepet töltött be. Mezőgazdaság, szőlőtermelés, szelvénygyártás, foglalkoztatás jellemezte. A 130 éves élelgyárral a település megkapta az ipari létesítménye. A város határában állnak a BORSODABEY vegyipari létesítmény és a Borsodi Műterem.

A település műemlék temploma a XV. században épült református templom a Kálvin téren található. A falusi katedrális külsőjében kétféle gótikus, belsejében barokk stílusú. A római katolikus templom a XVIII. században épült, copf stílusban. Többi műemlék épület a Gedeon-kúria, a tájház és a Lukács József-országos határőrségi szőlőház.



- Püspökmesteri Hivatal
 - Református Templom
 - Református Párkány
 - Római Katolikus Templom
 - Állatorvos Iskolák
 - 103 sz. Ipari Szakmunkás Intézet
 - Csodák
 - Orvosi Rendelő
 - Gyógyvizek
 - Rendőrhely
 - Pénzügyi Hivatal
 - Művelődési és sportközpont
 - Püspökmesteri Hiv. Egészség és Városmegőrzési Oszt.
 - MÁV Állomások
 - Bencézok
 - Tűzoltó
 - Tájház (Lukács József szőlőház)
 - Városi Könyvtár
 - Önkormányzati Sporttelep
 - Szennyvíztisztító
 - Öregkő Napközi Otthona
 - Szociális Otthon
 - Posta
 - Műterem
- | | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Ady Endre u. 06-07 | Harmat u. B6 | Móricz Zs. u. C4 |
| Árkotmány u. C7 | Házafas u. A4-B4 | Munkácsy M. u. E4-F4 |
| Arany János u. C5-D5 | Hársta u. A3-B2 | Orgona u. C4 |
| Atilla u. F5-G5 | Hegyalja u. A3-A4 | Pábközy M. u. G7-H8 |
| Ámos u. F1 | Hősök u. B4 | Patak u. D6-D7 |
| Árpád u. E5 | Hunyadi u. F5-F6 | Párh u. B5-B6 |
| Bajcsy-Zs. u. F4-F5 | Ibolya u. E3-F2 | Petőfi Sándor u. D7-E5 |
| Baross Gábor u. B6-C7 | Innyé János u. B7-C6 | Petrő Antal u. C7-D6 |
| Bartók Béla u. F2-F3 | Iskolaközpont u. F5 | Pécsi Sándor u. C6 |
| Battyányi u. E5 | István király u. A3-C4 | Porzsonyi u. C7-C8 |
| Bánkai u. E6 | Jókai Mór u. E5 | Radnóti M. u. H7-H8 |
| Bányász u. C6 | József Attila u. G8 | Rákóczi Ádám u. C7 |
| Bem József u. D5 | Kálvin tér u. F5 | Rákóczi F. u. F5-F6 |
| Benedek Elek u. D6-F6 | Kandó Kálmán u. C6 | Rezeda u. E3-F4 |
| Bercsényi u. D4-D5 | Kassai u. C6-C7 | Rózsa u. D7 |
| Berzsenyi D. u. A3-B3 | Katalin u. E1-F1 | Semmelweis u. D4 |
| Bethlen G. u. D5-D6 | Katona József u. C3C4 | Somogyi Béla u. D4 |
| Bocskai u. D6-E5 | Kazinczy F. u. E3-F3 | Sport u. C4-C5 |
| Bors vezér u. C6-C7 | Kilán György u. A4-C4 | Széchenyi I. u. A3-B4 |
| Bükkalja u. C6-D7 | Kilnzi u. C8-D7 | Szonoy Gy. u. E5-E6 |
| Csaba u. B4 | Király u. E2-F1 | Táncsics M. u. E1-F2 |
| Csalogány u. A3 | Köztársaság u. B6 | Tárna u. C5-D6 |
| Csurgai Á. u. G7 | Középszőlő u. B6 | Töbökly Imre u. D5-E4 |
| Damjánich u. G7 | Középszőlő u. B6 | Városház u. C7 |
| Dankó Pista u. G7 | Középszőlő u. B6 | Városház u. B5-B6 |
| Daró u. G7 | Középszőlő u. B6 | Városház u. B5-B6 |
| Deák F. u. G7 | Középszőlő u. B6 | Városház u. B5-B6 |
| Déryné u. G7 | Középszőlő u. B6 | Városház u. B5-B6 |
| Dózsa u. G7 | Középszőlő u. B6 | Városház u. B5-B6 |
| Eperjesi u. G7 | Középszőlő u. B6 | Városház u. B5-B6 |
| F. u. G7 | Középszőlő u. B6 | Városház u. B5-B6 |

The neighborhood across the bridge (Photo: Krista Harper)

Research setting and key findings

The project took place in a small city in northeastern Hungary hit hard by unemployment since the collapse of state socialism in 1989 and the closing of its glass factory in the 1990s. The Roma community, about 20% of the town's population, has been especially vulnerable. The Sajó Association is based in a predominantly Roma neighborhood just across the bridge from the town square. Although the neighborhood has been a part of the town for many decades, the municipality has invested fewer resources in building public infrastructure than it has in neighborhoods on the other side of the river.

The research team used photography to document and to generate discussion of community concerns, as well as sources of neighborhood pride. Several key concerns emerged: access to public infrastructure such as indoor water, sewerage and safe playgrounds, waste and dumping, energy and fuel poverty, and low-quality housing. Points of pride included community members' attachment to the Sajó River landscape, their enjoyment of household gardens and animals, and family relationships offering support in the face of racism and social exclusion.



"The very same week that this picture was taken, water pipes were being upgraded in neighborhoods across the bridge." (Photo: Sándor Kelemen)



"The sewer lines stop at the bridge. This is not a small village—over 2000 people live here. It smells bad, and people can't use their yards for gardening and playing when there is an outhouse in back." (Photo: Sándor Kelemen)



"Every time you need to wash or cook or clean, someone has to go to the street for water." (Photo: Mariann Bari)



Household water system; bathing a baby (Photos: Klaudia Kelemen)





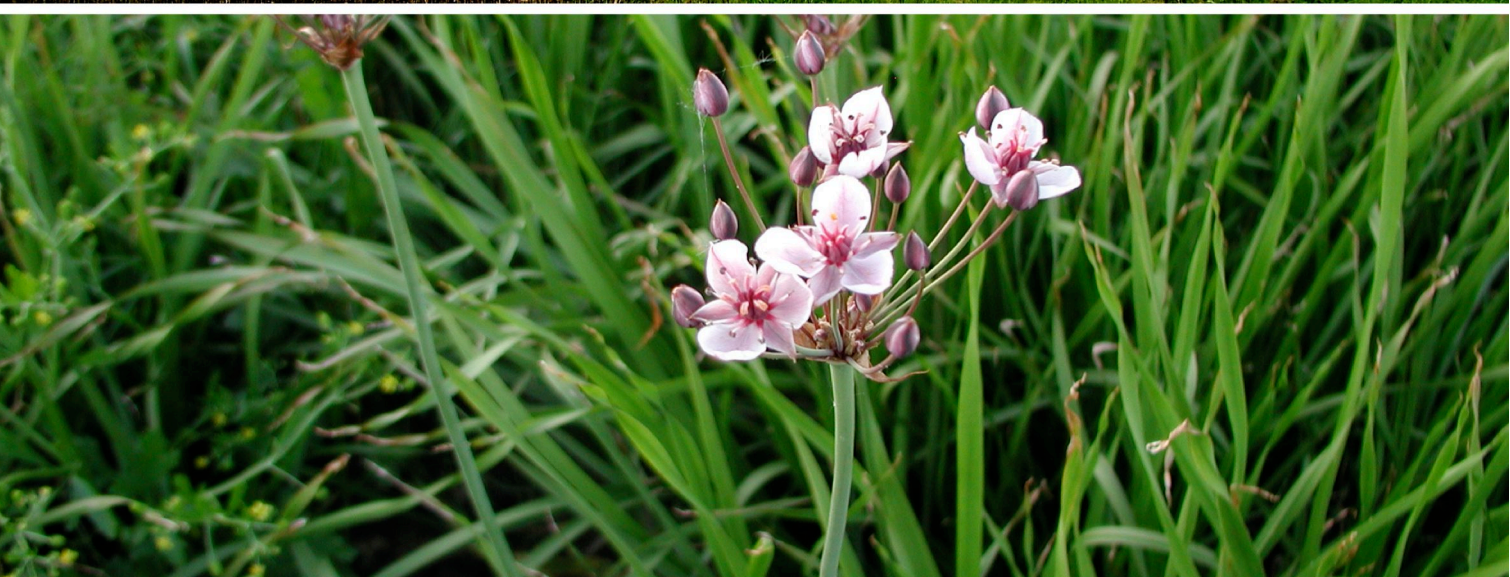
Enjoying the Sajó riverscape (Photos: Judit Bari, left, Sándor Kelemen, right)



"Everyone dumps their trash next to our neighborhood...if you look at these piles, there are brands that people in our neighborhood don't use." (Photos: Krista Harper, left; Judit Bari, right)



"Before, we had the glass factory—everyone in town made jars and bottles for the whole country. Now we have no jobs, and we are drowning in plastic bottles and trash." (Photo: Sándor Kelemen)





Sajó wetlands (Photos: Sándor Kelemen, top left, Krista Harper, bottom left, Betti Stéfan, above)



Housing (Photos: Gabor Ruzsó, above; Sándor Kelemen, right)





"Some families can afford to buy wood, but otherwise you have to collect it along the river. If you get caught, they'll fine you or take your bike away." (Photo: Klaudia Kelemen)



"What is our energy policy?" (Photo: Klaudia Kelemen)



"She was placed in the 'Gypsy room' at the Miskolc hospital... She saw the nurses treat a younger mother very badly there. It took away from the joy of having a new baby."



(Photos on both pages: Klaudia Kelemen)





Food and family (Photos: Klaudia Kelemen, left top row and bottom row left, Gábor Ruzsó, bottom row right; Judit Bari, above)





The next generation at play (Photos: Mariann Bari, left top row; Betti Stéfan and Sándor Kelemen, left bottom row; Sándor Kelemen, above)



Community members, town officials, and activists from other cities attended the neighborhood photo exhibition. (Photos: Linda Carranza)



The team hosted national activists and policymakers at a facilitated photo exhibition in Budapest. Bari and Harper presented the project to the UNCESCR in Geneva. (Photos: Betti Stéfan, left and Krista Harper, above right)

The Sajó River Declaration

Sájoszentpéter, Hungary---June 13, 2007
(translated from Hungarian by Krista Harper)

For decades, the conditions of Roma communities have gotten worse. Many people in many places have organized conferences, held discussions between high-ranking officials, and spoken in our name in parliamentary and other debates. Rarely have we, the Roma, had the opportunity to show our circumstances and to voice our opinions, feelings, and ideas about issues affecting our own lives.

Photos that we ourselves have taken are a good tool for communicating to others, and to our own community, too. Our pictures quickly and simply show how we live and what strengths and problems exist side by side in our community.

Photos show us the positive things that make us feel good about our community. These pictures show us that we have strengths within ourselves to create a more liveable environment and more possibilities for ourselves. Bicycling, fishing, gardening, and animal husbandry in our community—these practices show that we love and value the natural environment. With our shared strengths, we can do more for the environment in which we live. Our pictures also call attention to possibilities for a more healthy lifestyle: dancing, football, bicycling, and gardening are all activities that we can mobilize to improve our own health.

These photos also show how difficult our everyday lives are. We do not usually contemplate how much time we spend carrying water when we want to drink, cook, bathe, or clean; how much time we spend gathering wood when we want to cook food or heat our houses. No one takes the time to count up how many hundreds of kilometers we walk each year, just to use the outhouses in our yards. It is not just the kilometers, but also the ongoing threat to our health that we would like to show in these pictures. Our pictures show the poor quality housing, bad heating devices, illegal waste dumps, and the lack of playgrounds and parks. Our pictures show public spaces strewn with litter, unusable and crowded yards, and outhouses located too close to our houses.

These problems are all harmful, but they can be changed, too. We would like to draw the attention of domestic and international institutions to the lack of environmental justice and related public health issues.

What do we mean, when we talk about "environmental justice"? We mean that every community should have access to sewerage, clean water, clean air, possibilities for heating, liveable and energy-efficient housing, green spaces (parks, playgrounds, sports fields), and protection from environmental hazards such as pollution and toxic waste. These services are the birthright of all citizens, regardless of their ethnic or socioeconomic status, as is the right to participate in policy decisions related to the environment and living conditions. These rights are guaranteed by the Hungarian constitution and by European and other international human rights charters. We call upon fellow community residents and members of the professions to help us place pressure on institutions to realize these rights and to improve our lives.

Contact information and acknowledgements

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